THE PURPOSE OF THE PROPHETS.

M. S. NATESON.

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The Purpose of The Prophets

BY

M. S. NATESON,

Teacher, Hindu Secondary School, Trichinopoly.

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THE PURPOSE OF THE PROPHETS.

MAN is by nature imperfect and dependent, ever since he began to live on the face of the earth. In the stone age, in the copper age, in the bronze age and in the iron age he has to depend on something outside of himself in order to pull on what is commonly called life. He has to obtain a living. He feels the pangs of hunger and thirst; and these can be obliterated only by extraneous agencies. To eat, he requires vegetable or animal food, and food cannot be had without any extraneous help. An animal has to be killed for which weapons are required. The manufacture of weapons again is no independent task. Or corn has to be sown and reaped; which also means dependency on extraneous agencies. In short, he has always felt the necessity of calling upon one who is greater than himself. Everybody loves life; "in this world there is nothing dearer to a creature than its life," says Bhishma. Once Vyasa was walking along the field of Kurukshetra, when he observed a worm crawling quickly away from the tread of his feet. Seeing

the anxiety of the animal for its life, Vyasa gave it the power of speech and asked the worm why Narada, for he it was, who had taken the shape of a worm as the result of some evil *karma*, was so careful to protect even that despicable worm life; to which Narada answered "O Vyasa, to your eyes, my worm body is despicable; but to mine eyes it is not so. Even in this life, I have enough to make me love my existence, for so has Maya ordained." And in this struggle for existence, it is found that only the fittest survive. These survivors inspire their successors. The new-born baby is inspired and emulated by the example of an elder who has survived as the fittest in the great struggle for existence. Although by introspective philosophical analysis, this external power has been and may be demonstrated to be only the latent energy in his own being, yet man, in his ignorance, conceives of a perfect independent being of his own nature, possessed of all the requisite qualities to make him survive in the struggle, and this being he calls "deity". To a savage, a brutish ignorant man of an era prior to the stone age,

who perhaps lived a million or two years ago, and whose environments were peculiarly suited to the times which we speak of, the idea of god ought to have arisen in this way ; and this god was recognised either as the spirit of a departed ancestor or as a fetish. To this being was attributed a power wonderful in its exercise and whenever man survived in the great struggle for existence he praised his god ; and if nature went against him, he cursed his god and withheld his usual annual or biennial feast. Later on, the idea of prayer before accomplishing or trying to accomplish a particular object took concrete form and the remote ancestor of humanity is discovered lying prostrate before a grave or a crude human shape represented often as having supernumerary hands or heads. Very often his prayers are granted by, or most often without an interference on the part of, the being worshipped; and human egoism, *ahamkara,* as it is termed in Sanskrit, feels bound to thank deity as the giver of all. Somehow or other, this theory has been the origin of every known form of theology, and although human intelligence,

almost divinely perfected in this twentieth century, can take to abstruse metaphysical philosophising, it should be granted that extra-ordinary beings, beings more clever and more energetic than the surrounding elements, are born again and again to prepare the ground for the coming generations. This crude notion of a greater being is made more manifest as we study the unwritten history of the various nations of the earth of various periods from the age of invertebrates to the age of mammals. Whether these extra-powerful beings were worshipped, or are to be worshipped, is a matter which does not concern us at all. Suffice it to say that history which is but a repetition of the past though in a modified form is full of these great personalities, *avataras* as they are called in Sanskrit, prophets as I would like to term them. In the *Bhagavad Gita* also it is said that whenever man feels despondent, whenever there is a fear of death and extinction, there comes a divine encouragement in human form, age after age. Such being the original ideas regarding the purpose of these supermen, let some concrete examples of pro-

phets—ancient as well as modern—be taken and from their life-work let the purpose for which they came be deduced.

Back, back, beyond the range of history, there was a time when the wickedness of earth's residents caused their own self-destruction, and when the newer generations came, they were left without a guide. All the elders were gone. They felt the necessity of some one whose example and energy would stimulate them to a renewal of their own past. In despair, man prayed to his deity to come down and save him. The prayer was heard, and in answer a being was born who was to lead the life of an ideal man, whose example would be an object-lesson to the people of the earth. Such was the purpose of the *avatara* of Sri Ramachandra. When the warrior class as a class ceased to exist with the subsidence of the wrath of a greater Rama of the axe, the newer generations of Kshatriyas failed to realise their *svadharma* and the Lord took human shape for a time. Subject to the greatest trials, living under the most uncongenial atmosphere, Sri

Rama held as his one rule of life that obedience to parents and elders, the faithful carrying out of their behests and the protection of refugees, do constitute the *svadharma* of the *Kshatriya* class, and in spite of all the difficulties that might arise from the carrying out of this *svadharma*, these cardinal points earmark the community as a whole as destined to be the fit rulers of the earth. As a boy, Visvamitra had to be helped; as a man, Vibhishana had to be saved. Honour had to be retrieved, and dishonour, manifested in the person of the ten-headed monster, had to be vanquished, before bliss could be realised. In order to show this object-lesson, the Lord was born as a common man, lived as a common man, and when his work was accomplished, died a glorious death, a death by suicide in the *Sarayu*. That was the ideal life of self-sacrifice, a life which cares for others at the expense of one's own self, to live which Sri Ramachandra came.

But times progress, rather change. And another manifestation was needed. People became merely mechanical and every man was

doing everything for his own individual comfort. Self-sacrifice had disappeared, and the world was in danger of death and destruction. Again a prayer went forth that a fit man be born to survive in the struggle, and this time the manifestation was on the banks of the *Yamuna.* Sri Krishna was born, the *poornavatara.* The life and work of Sri Krishna are an eternal torchlight under whose illumination the whole of humanity may stay and whose energy being transferred to mortals, they can prepare themselves for the struggle to come anew. The actions of Sri. Krishna, even since baby-hood, are the wonder of all who care to know them. The many-sided picture he painted and the various aspects of his manifestation can never be realised unless one indeed becomes Krishna himself.

In the first place, Sri Krishna was Love incarnate. Love that cared not for name and fame, no, not even for father or mother, nor for anything that is held dear by the work-a-day world, was practically illustratrd by this *avatara.* He was the beloved of the *Gopis.* Even as

a boy, he was dear to one and all of the *Gopis*. Ah! that most marvellous passage in the Srimad Bhagavata, which none but holy ones might hear, the *Rasakrida*, clearly proves that the *Gopis* did not care for anything other than Krishna. They did not care to know him as the Almighty Lord of the Universe or as the son of their chief, or as this and that, but he was to them for ever the same Krishna. And here it should be explained to English-educated young men and those that have been and are their masters that a right understanding of this *Rasakrida* is the one key to the secrets of *Bhakti-yoga*. They do not perceive clearly and render everything dim and obscure with their borrowed coloured specks. Their horizon is small, and happy souls! they care not to look beyond eating, drinking and begetting children, all in geometrical progression. They are veritable children, and such children to judge of the Almighty by human standards of morality! Swami Vivekananda tells such people in his sweet musical language, "Boys, irreverent boys, moustached babies, stand back from such blasphemy." It must be noted that neither the

English-educated young man nor his European Pandit is the authority for Sri Krishna. It should also be remembered that the story-teller is the eternally pure Sukadeva, son of Krishna Dvaipayana Veda Vyasa. The time and scene of the Bhagavatha Purana is to speak plainly the death-bed of King Parikshit, and certainly the meaning lies far beyond carnality and lust. Aye, those who are not in a position to conceive of other beings in their true light, yet steeped in the commercialisms of this world, trying to barter and trade with intent to gain spirituality, are not even fit to study the allegory. Forget first the love for name and fame, forget first the love of wife and children, forget the love of everything that this little world can give, and then and then only can be conceived the madness of the *Gopis'* love. Such a love, call it affection, or love, or devotion, or anything else, is indescribable and none who has not once tasted it can realise what it is.

Let us go further down to the very same Krishna as surviving in the struggle for exis-

tence. *Devas* and human beings were oppressed beyond power of endurance by Kamsa, and Sri Krishna the foretold slayer of the demon was already on his mission to do the glorious work of liberating humanity from the clutches of wickedness. All possible means were tried to do away with the Lord; from Pootana and Chataka, from Dhenuka and the whirlwind, from the great forest conflagration and the greater loss of cows and cowherd boys, from the anger of Indra and the ire of Varuna, from the great poisonous serpent Kaliya, from one and all of these dangers, Sri Krishna escaped unhurt; yet Kamsa hoped to vanquish the divine boy of twelve. With a blow of his fist, even as his divine figure is painted by Raja Ravi Varma, the demon was slain, and Ugrasena restored to his throne. For the first time in his life, Sri Krishna saw face to face his mortal parents and liberated them from the dungeons where the anger and fear of Kamsa had imprisoned them and where he himself first saw the light of day.

The Lord then prepared himself to redeem his friend Arjuna from the temporary slavery

to despondency into which he had fallen. Arjuna's despair he calls *Anaryajushtam*, *Asvargyam* and *Akirtikaram* and goads him on to the fierce conflict. He who was the co-worker of Arjuna in previous incarnations, Narayana the companion of Nara, he who came down for the sole purpose of bringing about the Bharata war, he is seen now on the field of battle, ostensibly the gratuitous servant of his friend, calling on Arjuna to be the instrumental cause of destruction. "By me are they already overcome; be thou the outward cause," addressed the Lord to Arjuna, and when he was not convinced the Lord took his own eternal form and showed the same to Arjuna, that form which verily the gods ever long to see, that form which has never once been taken since, either before or after Sri Krishna's time; Arjuna is confounded and dumbfounded and the instruction in *Adhyatma* is begun, concluded and summarised. The Lord Sri Krishna is the practical example of his own teachings. The Vedanta Sutras and the Upanishads which are but dim revelations of the *Adhyatma* wisdom required a living and a practical commentary

in the person of the Dictator of the Song Celestial. And the Lord had to utter in so many plain words that most secret of all paths, yet the easiest to follow, the path of self-surrender to God. "Abandoning all *Dharmas*, come unto me alone for shelter; sorrow not; I will liberate thee from all sins."

Turn we now our attention to more recent times. The teachings of the lord were misunderstood and misinterpreted. The Brahman priests who held a position in society almost indentical with godhood became the oppressors of the people and a general belief that animal sacrifices destroy sins became prevalent; so much so that almost every householder began to revel in animal food purchased from the slaughter-house of the Brahman-priest-officiating sacrifices. The time was ripe and the Lord took shape as a *Tyagi*, as a *Sannyasi*, as a self-renounced recluse, preaching supreme wisdom wherever he went. He was able to do mighty work and to-day his followers lie scattered in all parts of the globe. Our motherland, the motherland of the Buddha, is still regarded

with a species of love and veneration by the great Buddhistic nations of China and Japan, such as is not known in any other part of the globe. The Olcotts and the Blavatskys have also been the preachers of the self-same gospel though they twisted and rendered shapeless the ideals of the world-honoured *Tathagata*, and Sir Edwin Arnold has also made a truer portrait of the Lord's incarnation story. But misinterpreters were not wanting, the tale that the Lord was here for deluding demons with false doctrines was invented and whosoever paid outward reverence to him was massacred.

At such a stage of the world's history, there arose at Kaladi in the Kerala country that modern mighty genius, he who completed his writings at the age of sixteen. *Sri Sankara Bhagavad Poojyapadacharya* incarnated to re-establish the ancient *Vaidika Dharma*, and as the people of his time demanded ratiocination before anything else, he firmly established the philosophical truth of the *Advaita* and wrote his wonderful commentaries. The *Bhashyas* are regarded to-day as revelations by the great

western nations of Europe and America. He travelled throughout the length and breadth of the land and illustrated by his simple yet prosaic poems the truths of his philosophy to average minds. An encouragement was given to Sanskrit learning and to-day he is enshrined in the hearts of the people.

In the same manner, the people of Arabia and Palestine were groping in the dark and it was the will of the Lord to be present among his children for some time in the shape of Mahomed and Jesus. Although the followers of these prophets have misunderstood the teachings of the great ones and are making a mischievous use of what they say is left to them as relics, yet the purpose behind is very clear, viz., that struggling humanity needs an outside power to help it to survive in the great battle of life. The earnest and simple-minded Galilean teacher taught absolutely nothing different from the ideals of his predecessors who incarnated in this *Karma Bhumi*; and it may also be seen that India is the only country where non-Christians and non-Mussalmans

have helped the preaching of the gospels of Christ and Mohomed instead of hindering it, although it must be observed in passing that the missionaries are taking an undue and mischievous advantage of our spirit of toleration.

Let us go down to modern times still and gauge the situation as it is at the present time.

In the middle of the last century, India was in the throes of a revolutionary religious convulsion. Missionary propagandism under the enthusiastic leadership of Hebers and Duffs was reaping a rich and a glorious harvest. Men like Madhu Sudan Dutta, Krishna Mohan Banerjee and Mahadeva Aiyar, whose talents and scholarship were of the very highest order, were embracing Christianity without a moment's hesitation. The world had become too much with the people. Men's thoughts, men's fortunes, men's associations and men's views of things had undergone a sudden change. But divine love is never transmuted. It guides and ennobles man until he reaches perfection even in the flesh. There enters upon the scene

the great *guru*, the divine messenger, whose duty it is to raise from the shadow of death the chosen ones of *Badarayana* in *Bharatavarsha*. Sri Ramakrishna's divine intuition recovered, revealed and renewed the truth which was spoken of in the olden times, in the primeval forests, by the sacred waters, in Indian soil, the holiest of holy lands, and the trumpet-voice of the eternally-glorious Swami Vivekananda interpreted it to the world at large. The Lord is our master and his love and wisdom have again revealed themselves to us through the heralds of India's dawning renovation—two in one and one in two—Sri Ramakrishna and Swami Vivekananda.

We are drawing to a close. And the purpose behind all these manifestations is clear. As has been indicated in the opening paragraph, man in his despondency looks forward with eager expectation to a greater power to cope with him in the struggle for existence and he always does get this help. The great Lord Sri Krishna has vouchsafed this truth to us in his

well-known promise in the *Gita* and his seal and signature are there eternally reminding us of ultimate survival even after the bitterest of struggles, in other words of the triumph of the cause of righteousness.

Religion is the manifestation of the Divinity already in man

Vivekananda